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THE KURDS

January 1960

The Kurds as an armed force do not pose a threat to the present governments of Iran and Iraq. The Kurds are poorly equipped, poorly organized, and in the broad picture possess only harassment potential. In the event of the collapse of the governments in Teheran and Baghdad the Kurds have the potential to take control of their respective areas. Similarly, if the Iranian and Iraqi armies are engaged in non-Kurdish areas to the point of withdrawing substantial numbers of troops from northern garrisons, the Kurds would encounter little opposition to separatist activities. The Mahabad Republic was formed -- with Soviet support -- at a time when Iran found itself unable to direct Kurdish political activities. Should circumstances permit, the Soviet Union is probably ready once again to extend active support to a Kurdish independence movement. The danger lies not in a purely Kurdish effort, but in a Kurdish nationalist movement supported by the Soviet Union.

Iran, like Turkey, is probably more concerned with Kurdish nationalism than it is willing to admit. Iran's SAVAK organization is closely observing Kurdish activities to detect and snuff out independence activities. Kurdish leaders fleeing from Iraq have been welcomed in Iran with the aim of collecting prominent Kurds, isolating them, and thus putting to an end Kurdish nationalistic agitation for an independent Kurdistan. A more lenient Kurdish policy in Iraq has slowed the flight of refugees into Iran and many of the refugees have returned, although a number of leaders remain in Iran. Iran is, however, reluctant to permit the overt migration of the well organized Iraqi section of the Herki tribe into traditional grazing grounds northwest of Resaieh. Parti Demokrat Kurd agitators from Iraq are said to be active in border areas of Iranian Kurdistan, and some movement of Iranian Kurds into Iraq is permitted with the hope of securing information on activity among Iraqi Kurds. Although there is no indication that Iran is stirring up trouble in Iraqi Kurdistan, Iranian Kurds are capable of creating disturbances in Iraq if urged to do so by their government.

The lack of a common leadership is a stumbling block to an effective separatist state. No Kurdish leader has ever had the stature to command a universal following across Kurdistan. Meetings of Kurdish leaders have been reported and it is evident that the Soviets are active in Kurdistan, but a firm picture of alignments is not available. The Kurds of Iran dislike the central government but many recall the performance of the Soviet Union during the days of the Mahabad Republic;

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most Kurdish leaders in Iraq do not support the Qassim government and at the same time distrust the Soviet Union. A number of Kurdish leaders might join and initially cooperate with a Soviet-supported independence movement if tangible evidence of Soviet good faith were forthcoming. How long independent leaders would continue to back a centrally controlled effort is a matter of speculation. Soviet support and direction could be a unifying factor among the Kurds, but this same outside direction could create conditions intolerable to Kurdish leaders who joined an independence movement to escape non-Kurdish authority.

Mulla Mustafa Barzani, although not well liked personally, is apparently active in Kurdish affairs at the present time. He is reportedly in contact with many Kurdish leaders and his name has been linked with clandestine free Kurdistan movements in Iran and Turkey. His loyalty to causes other than his own political advancement is doubtful. He has apparently had differences with the Communist Party of Iraq, but has probably maintained his contact with the Soviet Union. His uneasy relationship with the government of Iraq would probably disintegrate if Arab nationalist pressures on Kurdish areas are increased. It is reported that should Qassim fall, Barzani will break with the government of Iraq. His relationship with other Kurds is similarly uneasy -- even a portion of the Barzani tribe is anti Mulla Mustafa -- and to stay politically alive he will probably continue to espouse Kurdish independence and to avail himself of the organizational advantages of a close relationship with the Soviet Union. Reports of air delivery of Soviet arms to Iraqi Kurdistan and of the distribution of Soviet arms to Kurdish tribesmen may indicate that Mulla Mustafa is being used to inject Soviet influence into an independence movement.

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